

Communists' America

Representation of The United States in Hungarian
Communist Anti-American Propaganda

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1. Introduction

The era between 1948 and 1989 was a really special one from the aspect of American-Hungarian relations. During the 40 years of communism, when Hungary belonged to the sphere of Soviet interest, diplomatic, cultural and political relations between the USA and Hungary could be characterized as really fragile and unstable . Constant changes were generated by the international atmosphere of East-West relations. One would suggest that American-Hungarian relationship in this time can easily be defined by mutual hostility arising from colliding ideological, political and economic background. However the actual issue is much more complex than it seems to be, since complete isolation of the eastern and the western hemisphere could not be possible on the long run. This fact simply suggests that some connection between the two spheres of interest, between the world of free capitalism, or – as communist countries called it, – 'imperialism,' and that of communism must be held, and this was also valid for the relationship between Hungary and the United States. This claim does not exclude the fact that during this 40 years American-Hungarian relations came to a complete standstill and besides they reached a number of crises. Problems and hostility was rooted in ideological contradictions, and therefore in the fact that both poles regarded their own way right and justified and denied the legitimacy of the other. Consequently, a mutual two way propaganda evolved on both sides. The USA and the Western European countries were sustaining a constant anti-communist propaganda, for their own peoples and they were constantly making a variety of attempts (the explicitness of which depended on the current state of relations) to make this propaganda reach the countries of the Soviet bloc. On the other hand the leadership of the Soviet Union and its satellite states were trying to sustain anti-imperialist propaganda with more or less (but rather less) success. The weakness of the communist propaganda lay ironically in the fact that some information of the western world

was able to reach behind the Iron Curtain, and provided a taste of freedom for those living within the restrictions of communism.

My research deals with pieces of the official communist propaganda published in Hungary between 1948 and 1989. I chose four texts from the early 1950s and two travelogues from the 1960s dealing with the United States. The texts of the 1950s: (1) a preface for János Gyetvai's travelogue, *Ezt láttam Amerikában...* [This is What I Saw in America...], written by Iván Boldizsár; (2) and (3) two foreign policy pamphlets from 1952, released by the Hungarian Peace Council; (4) an economic analysis of the Horthy-system. The 1960s' sources include a (5) travelogue from László Helon, published in 1966 and (6) another one written by Iván Boldizsár, published in 1971. For the further parts of the chronology I use my BA thesis, which analyzed Hungarian travel literature about the US in the 1970s and 1980s. I intend to focus on the differences in the rhetoric of the texts from different periods: how socialist writings use the schematic thoughts of the official anti-American language controlled by censorship and how these patterns change during the decades of socialism. I would like to analyze what means (defined naturally by the censorship of the time) the socialist texts use to reflect the official rhetoric and how they use them to conform to the requirements of the ever changing political climate.

2. A Brief History of Post World War II American-Hungarian Relations

In order to gain a proper understanding of the rhetoric of the texts used during my research a comprehensive historical overview has to be provided. This is of key importance, since relations between Hungary and the United States were constantly changing and these changes were constantly affecting the current official tone of the publications.

US-Hungarian relations before the outbreak of World War II was based on the peace treaty signed in 1921, after the end of World War I. From the aspect of American-Hungarian relations, the period between the two world wars can be described as a friendly one. Helping the post-Trianon Hungary find remedy for her grievances – caused by the territorial loss she suffered as a result of the peace treaty – was the number one role Hungary expected from the US. However, "ministers were exchanged, and full diplomatic, economic, and cultural contacts were developed for the first time in the common history of the two peoples."¹ Hundred millions of dollar was invested in Hungary by American corporations, such as the MAORT [Hungarian-American Oil Co.], Vacuum Oil Co., Unió Textilművek Rt. [Union Textile Works Co.], Ford or Singer Sewing Machine Company. Moreover a "free movement of peoples and ideas"² was also possible.

With the emergence of two competing superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, the previously built system of American-Hungarian relations became completely destroyed within a few years. Hungary, as a satellite state of the USSR, belonged to the enemy of the United States, in this way from this time on the friendly relation of the interwar years was not possible to maintain anymore. However American-Hungarian relations cannot be regarded homogenous in the era of the bipolar world, since they were constantly changing

¹ Tibor Glant, "Travel Writing As a Substitute for American Studies in Hungary," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 16.1-2. (2010): 177. Hereafter cited as Tibor Glant, "Travel Writing As a Substitute for American Studies in Hungary."

² Tibor Glant, "Travel Writing As a Substitute for American Studies in Hungary," 177.

according to the current international and domestic situation. In his book, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989* [Hungarian-American relations 1945-1989], László Borhi distinguishes five stages in the state of relations between the two countries: (1) Period of transition, 1945-1948; (2) Closed zone, 1949-1956; (3) Era of retaliation, 1957-1963; (4) Détente, 1964-1978; (5) From indebtedness to system change, 1979-1989.³

2.1. Period of Transition, 1945-1948

This was the period of time when Hungary was on her way towards communist dictatorship. She was constantly coming under Soviet influence – first economically, then politically – and at the same time getting further and further from Western Europe and from the United States. Until 1947 trade between the US and Hungary was still significant. The United States did not intend to bring American-Hungarian relationship to a complete standstill, but rather to include Hungary in the European economy. A Hungarian delegation even visited Washington, as the result of which Hungary was given back her gold and silver reserves and art treasures that had been transported from Hungary after the war. However, the bipolarization of the world had already begun and the Soviet Union regarded Hungary her own "loot,"⁴ thus the United States could not – and in order to avoid deepening of the already existing conflict did not intend to – step up explicitly against Soviet claims. As Hungarian economy and politics were gradually incorporated into Soviet field of interest, the country was at the same time denied economic assistance by the USA. However, in the summer of 1947 the Soviet leadership itself prescribed the buffer zone states to refuse Marshall Plan. In parallel to these American companies were squeezed out from Hungarian market due to two factors: (1) the United States imposed export restrictions on the Soviet bloc in 1948, and (2) in

³ László Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források* (Budapest: MTA Történelemtudományi Intézet, 2009), 5. Hereafter cited as Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*. Translation mine.

⁴ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 24. Translation mine.

the same year the Nationalization Act was issued in Hungary, which in most cases meant the total confiscation of private assets, with no exception to the US corporations. Moreover two American managers of MAORT were arrested and then expelled from Hungary, as a consequence of which the US closed Hungarian consulates both in New York and Cleveland.⁵

2.2. Closed Zone, 1949-1956

László Borhi's title choice for this period is telling, since "from 1949 Cominform [Communist Information Bureau] officially declared its policy of seclusion from the West."⁶ In the same year, on 21th December – after arrests and insults of American citizens – the State Department of the US warned its citizens staying in Hungary to leave the country, since the US was not able to "guarantee their security"⁷ any more. By the beginning of the 1950s diplomatic relations between Hungary and the United States ceased to exist and commercial connections also hit rock bottom; consulates and commercial agencies were shut down. Any cultural and intelligence activity of the Hungarian American embassy was banned. In 1950 the US released the COCOM List [Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls], which was a trade embargo against communist countries. Although the list was eased by Eisenhower from 1953, the embargo impaired the economy of the Soviet bloc, causing serious shortages in Hungary as well. Moreover "during 1955 the Soviet Union unexpectedly and significantly decreased the export of raw materials to Hungary."⁸ In this way Hungary needed to supply a part of her demand from capitalist sources. It was made possible by an 1954 decision of COMECON [Council for Mutual Economic Assistance] that allowed increase of trade with the Western world to some extent. The economic need encouraged Hungary to seek opportunity for releasing the hostile relationship with the United States, but between 1949 and

⁵ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 30.

⁶ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 26. Translation mine.

⁷ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 30. Translation mine.

⁸ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 37. Translation mine.

1956 the international atmosphere (during the heyday of the Cold War) did definitely not allowed any improvement. The outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution in October 1956 did not do any better, what is more it even undermined the mutually antagonistic image between Hungary and the US.

2.3. Era of Retaliation, 1957-1963

The American-Hungarian relations were still determined by the international situation i.e. the current state of relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States. Since Hungarian foreign policy was strictly adjusted to Soviet demands, the ongoing Vietnam War, the failure of the 1959 Eisenhower-Khrushchev meeting at Camp David, the 1960 May 1st violation of the Soviet airspace by American spy planes and the Cuban Missile Crisis did not favored East-West relations – however the danger of the 1962 Cuban incident brought a slight approximation between the US and the SU.

Besides the unfavorable international atmosphere, the consequences of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution also affected American-Hungarian relations in this period. The Kádár regime took its inhumane revenge on the rebels and Cardinal Mindszenty had been staying in the US Embassy since November 4th, 1956. Moreover there remained unsettled finances between the United States and Hungary (pre-World War II bonds, reparations, nationalized American assets). American-Hungarian relations reached their anticlimax again. Embassy activities did not exceeded administrative level and Hungarian leadership even asked the American Embassy to reduce the number of its employees. The 1958 execution of Imre Nagy and others further deepened the relation-crisis. Moreover the UN suspended the Hungarian mandate in the organization⁹ on American request, and the termination of the suspension was depending on the easement of the Kádár regime.

⁹ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 77.

From the aspect of Hungary's economic dependence on the USA it was unaffordable for Hungarian leaders to keep Hungarian issue on UN agenda. Serious actions were needed to bring Hungary in a more favorable position, so in 1958 the Political Committee of the MSZMP KB [Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Labor Party] articulated to settle the relations with capitalist countries and the Hungarian issue in the UN.¹⁰ Kádár further reassured this with his statement: "The Hungarian government sincerely accepts the policy of peaceful coexistence [that] could not be conceivable twenty years ago, when the power of ideologies was much larger, but at the moment the largest problem is to prevent nuclear war between the two superpowers."¹¹ This view clearly coincided with the policy shift of the American leadership that gave up its policy of liberation – however without recognizing the legitimacy of the Soviet oppression – and switched to the policy of slow transformation. The US believed that the power of trade was able to "influence the course of events."¹² The US desired to revive her pre-World War II relations with the Soviet satellite states, that is why the State Department introduced a "selective Eastern European policy"¹³ – "bridge building policy" – that was based on differentiation between the countries concerned according to the extent of their dependency on the Soviet Union. Although the Kádár regime always remained loyal to Moscow, Hungarian leadership was trying to satisfy the demands of the UN and the US to improve relations. It was not easy for Hungary to meet the requirements, but the political atmosphere of Hungary had begun a slow but steady release, the result of which was the release of travelling limitations for the American embassy and the announcement of amnesty for political prisoners in April, 1963. Although the question of Cardinal Mindszenty and the unsettled finances remained, the UN decided to draw Hungarian issue off its agenda at the end

¹⁰ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 80.

¹¹ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 72. Translation mine.

¹² Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 76. Translation mine.

¹³ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 76. Translation mine.

of 1963. These milestones paved the way for further bilateral negotiations between Hungary and the US.

2.4. Détente, 1964-1978

Although bilateral negotiations began in May, 1964 in Budapest on political, economic and cultural issues, major breakthroughs were not achieved. Until the mid 1970s the pace of advancement in American-Hungarian relations lagged behind those of US relations with other socialist countries. The financial issues were still not settled, the Vietnam War reached its climax and most importantly the ideological gap seemed impossible to bridge, mainly due to the fact that the Kádár regime kept on being loyal to the SU. The travelling between Hungary and the United States was still problematic, hindered by a number of restrictions, moreover the Hungarian communist leadership had a strange habit of offering "lower quality reception for American officials arriving to Hungary."¹⁴ The visit of the Apollo-11 astronauts was collectively refused by socialist countries. On the other hand the foreign policy of the Nixon administration also delayed the normalization of relations, since although they preferred a faster and more aggressive way of approximation, the long desired economic benefits were not initiated. Moreover the COCOM embargo on the export of items of strategic importance was still valid.¹⁵

Cultural relations had always been a problematic issue since the first hints about normalization plans. On the one hand, the United States enforced such connections, as they realized that Hungarian public was definitely interested in the products of American pop culture, and they regarded "cultural penetration"¹⁶ an important means of liberalization and opening up of socialist regimes. On the other hand this exactly was the very reason why

¹⁴ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 107. Translation mine.

¹⁵ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 132.

¹⁶ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 100. Translation mine.

MSZMP KB was desperately trying to avoid cultural interactions and refused making cultural contracts for years. Interestingly enough the first achievements were made in the field of cultural relations. According to an agreement between Ford Foundation and KKI [Cultural Relations Institute] a cultural exchange program was launched from 1964 that provided opportunity for Hungarian scholars and artists to travel to the US. A year later American exhibitors were for the first time allowed to participate in BNV [Budapest Expo]. Agreement was signed with the American organization, IREX, on another mutual scholarship program in 1969.¹⁷ These facts are not so interesting and unbelievable if someone looks at János Kádár's 1965 claim: "willing to travel anytime, anywhere in order to improve Hungarian-American relations."¹⁸ Although anti-imperialism was still prevailing on ideological level, more and more actions proved that coexistence and cooperation between Hungary and the United States could be possible. Nixon recognized the sovereignty of socialist countries and in 1967 American-Hungarian diplomatic relations were raised to ambassadorial level and ambassadors were exchanged the next year.

Cardinal Mindszenty left the American embassy after 15 years on 28th September, 1971, which was an important step towards deepening relations. Settling finances and gain the MFN [Most Favored Nation] status was the major issue in focus for Hungary. A number of steps were taken towards this goal in the years of 1972 and 1973: Hungarian consulates were opened again in the USA; Kádár welcomed Rogers, the American Secretary of State in Budapest (it was the first time that the leader of MSZMP negotiated with a member of the US government); "several Hungarian corporations signed production cooperation agreement with American companies;"¹⁹ the number of employees working for the Hungarian embassy in Washington was increased; and the 1973 senatorial delegation to Budapest received high quality reception. The international climate also favored Hungary: Nixon and Brezhnev

¹⁷ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 116.

¹⁸ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 102. Translation mine.

¹⁹ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 134. Translation mine.

managed to sign SALT-1 in May, 1972 and the Vietnam War was ended the next February. In this way the financial agreement between Hungary and the United States was signed on 6th March, 1973. From this time on "American banks became more and more interested in Hungarian businesses,"²⁰ which also meant the launch of credit programs. László Borhi evaluates the period between 1976 and 1978 as the most successful until then from the aspect of American-Hungarian relations.²¹ "In October, 1976 the cultural, educational-scientific and technological-scientific agreement, that had been negotiated for years, was signed. The Holy Crown of Hungary was ceremoniously given back to Hungary on 6th January, 1978. It is important to note that it was done on terms that Hungary made it possible for each and every Hungarian person all over the world to get visa and see the crown if s/he wished to. Another important breakthrough of the same year is the conclusion of the MFN agreement on 7th July. However the contract needed to be renewed year by year. These achievements owe much to the "rearticulated East European policy of the Carter administration"²² that recognized the importance of the socialist countries' in American foreign policy. Although there were still some setbacks in the mid-1970s as well (e.g. István Deák, IREX scholarship history professor was expelled from Budapest, accused with espionage, or the effect of the worsening Soviet-US relations in 1975 could be felt), the period between 1964 and 1979 can be regarded an outstanding in all aspects of US-Hungarian relations.

2.5. From Indebtedness to System Change, 1979-1989

The turn of the decade brought negative changes in Soviet-American relations. "The two superpowers were accusing each other with the violation of SALT-1 [...]. The US Senate

²⁰ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 136. Translation mine.

²¹ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 150.

²² Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 158. Translation mine.

did not ratify the SALT-2 contract. The rivalry in the third world accelerated."²³ Since Hungarian socialist leadership was still representing Soviet interests, the changes in the international platform affected American-Hungarian relations as well, however to a much less extent than it did earlier. The planned visit of the Hungarian parliamentary delegation to Washington, and that of the US Secretary of State and even of the President to Budapest were delayed. The official communist ideology was still alive in Hungary, so was the fight against American pop culture. Tourism between Hungary and the United States remained unilateral, since very few Hungarian tourists travelled to the US. Some parts of the strategic restrictions of the COCOM were still in effect, therefore Hungary could not get access to American high technology. Moreover the need for the yearly renewal of MFN remained.

In spite of the fact that the improvement of American-Hungarian relations halted and even if its pace never again reached that of the 1970s, Hungary managed to keep its position by taking on a kind of mediator role between the superpowers. Vice President George Bush's 1983 visit to Budapest "raised the policy of differentiation to an official level that meant that Washington 'forms tighter political, economic and cultural relations with such countries as Hungary and Romania, which show greater openness and independence'"²⁴ The 1980s brought a serious financial crisis for Hungary, which was an important factor from the viewpoint of American-Hungarian relations. Hungary could fall back on US economic assistance, but not on Soviet. The US helped her join the International Monetary Fund (it is worth mentioning that it was done without previous permission from Moscow) and the World Bank. Some improvements were achieved in the field of cultural relations with the establishment of the Soros Foundation and that of a Hungarian professorate in the Indiana University. From the aspect of US-Hungarian relations the 1980s did not exceed the achievements of the 1970, however the already existing advancements were kept.

²³ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 170. Translation mine.

²⁴ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 171. Translation mine.

1989 brought a turning point in the history of Hungary and in parallel with this in the history of American-Hungarian relations. Socialist Hungary ceased to exist and a parliamentary democratic system was introduced. Its dependent status on the Soviet Union was terminated so was the official communist ideology and propaganda. The free democratic system paved the way for rearticulating her relations with the United States, and most importantly for the free expression of thoughts and ideas, without any censorship.

3.Representation of the United States in Hungarian Publications, 1948-1989

3.1 The 1950s

By the late 1940s Hungary became part of the Soviet buffer zone. As a satellite state to one of the superpowers, the sovereignty of the country became highly restricted.²⁵ By 1949 a totalitarian system was set up in Hungary, following the Soviet pattern, with the dictatorship of Mátyás Rákosi. In such system every spheres of life was managed at state level on the basis of the official ideology dictated by the Soviet Union. Publishers and presses – as every other fields of economy – were nationalized and came under central supervision. The Department of Public Education was set up in 1949 with the leadership of József Révai. Cultural life, including literature had a special role in this totalitarian system: with the forceful termination of cultural pluralism, art had to reflect and even spread the hegemony of Marxist ideology.²⁶ Publication of fine literature in the early 1950s was extremely limited – their number hardly exceeded 10 percent of the total publication²⁷ – since printing propaganda-like works of contemporary communist authors, representing the relevant political ideology was the main charge of the presses. Anyway a strict system of censorship ensured the filtering of non-appropriate literature: "Works that hard managed to get into publishers were meandering in the labyrinth system of lector reports and supervisor-editorial opinions. The lector marked as responsible editor in the imprint was personally responsible for the book s/he had been fostering."²⁸

²⁵ Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században* [The History of Hungary in the 20th Century], (Budapest: Osiris, 2000), 271. Hereafter cited as Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*.

²⁶ Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, 335.

²⁷ "A könyvkiadás története," *A magyar irodalom története 1945-1975*, ed. Miklós Béládi (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1981), accessed March 7, 2013, <http://mek.oszk.hu/02200/02227/html/01/46.html>. Hereafter cited as "A könyvkiadás története."

²⁸ "A háború után: a század második fele," *Kultúra, művészet, sport és szórakozás*, Vol. 3 of *Magyarország a XX. században* ed. Kollega Tarsoly István, accessed March 7, 2013,

On the other hand it was the time when the tensions of the bipolarized world skyrocketed. The Cold War reached its climax in the 1950s. The Korean War broke out in 1950, the Vietnam War 5 years later. Moreover official foreign policy of complete seclusion dictated by the Soviet Union further deepened the gap between the Eastern and the Western parts of the world. This very political climate was exactly reflected in the official propaganda literature published in the Soviet zone. The nationalized presses and publishers of the communist Hungary gave monopoly to this political tone as well, so the officially presented image of the United States in the 1950s' Hungary can clearly be made out from texts dealing with or at least mentioning the USA.

For my research I chose four texts on the United States, which were officially published in Hungary in the early 1950s: (1) Iván Boldizsár's "Az amerikai imperializmus útja és eszközei, Előszó helyett" [The Ways and Means of the American Imperialism, Instead of Preface], which is a prologue for János Gyetvai: *Ezt láttam Amerikában...* [This is What I Saw in America...]; (2) "Merénylet az emberiség ellen: Az amerikai imperialista gonosztevők baktériumháborúja" [Attempt Against Humanity: American Imperialist Miscreants' Germ War], which was published by the Hungarian National Peace Council; (3) Pál Gedeon: "Nyugat-Európa amerikai járószalagon" [Western Europe on American Leading-strings] and (4) György Magos: *Az angol és amerikai monopoltőke szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszilárdításában* [Role of the English and American Monopoly Capital in The Consolidation of Horthy-fascism].

Gyetvai János's travelogue, *Ezt láttam Amerikában...* was published in 1952 with a prologue by Iván Boldizsár, Hungarian writer and journalist.²⁹ Boldizsár completed Gyetvai's

<http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02185/html/448.html#450>. Hereafter cited as "A háború után: a század második fele." Translation mine.

²⁹ Before the outbreak of the Second World War Boldizsár was engaged in journalism and folklore research. He fought in the war and was taken prisoner by the Soviet army. After having been set free, he returned to journalism. In 1946 he was sent to Paris as a member of the delegation to the Peace Conference. Between 1947 and 1951 he was Secretary of State. During the Rákosi regime Boldizsár adjusted his writing style to satisfy the

work with an introduction that adjusted the travelogue to the relevant political ideology by setting the *proper* image about the United States.

Both "Merénylet az emberiség ellen" and Pál Gedeon's "Nyugat-Európa amerikai járószalagon" are 1952 issues of the National Peace Council's pamphlet series, which were presenting foreign affairs to the public in the framework of official communist ideology. Thus "Merénylet az emberiség ellen" is telling the story of supposed American germ war in Korea (the fact of which the United States denies),³⁰ while Gedeon's writing is dealing with the post-World War II American occupation in Western Europe.

György Magos approaches the United States from a different angle, since *Az angol és amerikai monopolizáció szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszilárdításában*, which was published in 1953, deals with the post-World War I American-Hungarian relations from an economic point of view.

Although the four sources were written by different authors and they were even published by different publishers, the same pattern can easily be traced in their handling of the American issue. As a result of the official requirements they are using the same images, sometimes even the same words and expressions to describe the United States. These prescribed patterns are present in the economic, political and cultural aspects of the description. Comparing the four texts four main thematic cores can be differentiated along which the United States is presented: (1) general and explicit aggression; (2) fascism, (3) constant attempt to emerge to world power, (4) anti-communist attitude that is definitely condemned to failure.

requirements of the official views of Marxist ideology. In the Kádár Era he was editing numerous journals and newspapers, including *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, which was restarted by Boldizsár in 1960. In 1970 he became the chairman of the Hungarian Pen Club. He received József Attila Prize in 1970 and State Prize in 1975. ("Boldizsár Iván," *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*, accessed December 12, 2011, <http://mek.niif.hu/00300/00355/html/ABC00523/02031.htm>.)

³⁰ Julian Ryall, "Did the US wage germ warfare in Korea?," *The Telegraph*, June 10, 2010, accessed March 7, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/7811949/Did-the-US-wage-germ-warfare-in-Korea.html>.

3.1.1. General and Explicit Aggression

The United States of America was described as aggressive and brutal even in later decades as well. The events of the Cold War, the emergence of the bipolarized world and the economic and military intervention in the life of Western Europe provided momentum for the communist leadership to exaggerate and highlight and distort the aggression of the United States.

Iván Boldizsár's prologue starts *in medias res* concerning the main themes. The first lines say: "János Gyetvai tells what he saw in America in the time when American imperialism lowers itself to less and less covert aggression and gets carried away by more and more shameful crimes."³¹ It is clear from the excerpt that the tone is not objective, not factual, but rather appeals to the emotions of the reader, as a means of convincing. The authors of the "Merénylet az emberiség ellen" use similar images to express the disapproval of the American war ethic in Korea. An example from József Révész's article characterizes the tone of the whole pamphlet:

American imperialists intend to extinguish peace-loving peoples, that is why they reach for the – according to them – "effective" means of genocide: germ war. American captains of death industry, who has lost their minds during their nightmares about world power, who lowered themselves to the end, and generals who have taken off their humanity intend to let the terrible epidemics of the middle ages to the Korean and Chinese peoples, to the whole world.³²

This is the general style that characterized the communist image-making about the United States: using carefully selected cumulative adjectives, exclusively negative ones designating and characterizing the United States. Pál Gedeon, the author of "Nyugat-Európa amerikai járőrszalagon" highlighted the relation between aggressive behavior and the American culture: "War policy on American command completely depraves the cultural life

³¹ Iván Boldizsár, "Az amerikai imperializmus útja és eszközei, Előszó helyett" [The Ways and Means of the American Imperialism, Instead of Preface], János Gyetvai, *Ezt láttam Amerikában...* [This is What I saw in America...], (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1952), 5. Hereafter cited as Boldizsár, *Preface*. Translation mine.

³² "Merénylet az emberiség ellen: Az amerikai imperialista gonosztevők baktériumháborúja," (Budapest: Országos Béketanács, 1952), 10. Hereafter cited as "Merénylet az emberiség ellen: Az amerikai imperialista gonosztevők baktériumháborúja." Translation mine.

of the Marshallized countries. The best of the progressive intellectuals are in constant fight against the intellectual aggression. Organic part of the American war plans is to blur the perspicacity of the masses, to poison the souls, to prepare the war."³³ A parallel conclusion is drawn by György Magos, however in economic respect: "English and American imperialist agreed on the methods and extent of the plunder of Germany."³⁴ Although Magos' quotation is about the post- World War I situation instead of the post World War II, he perfectly managed to match the same pattern to an earlier era as well.

The previous examples make it clear that emphasizing general and explicit aggression of the United States was one of the guiding lines in the communist anti-American ideology, since the four texts deal with different issues even with different periods of history, they were written by different authors, but the motifs are the same.

3.1.2. Fascism

One of the most favorite themes of the communist anti-American propaganda was searching and evidently finding connection between the United States and fascism. It was thought to be a very effective way of convincing the public that the US was inherently evil. The 1950s: the memory of the Nazi aggression and their concentration camps had still been intense. It was obviously practical to use it against the hostile emerging superpower. The official literature of the 1950s openly identified the United States with fascist values and ideology. It is the most frequently used motif in the texts analyzed. The reader can find direct references or hints on almost every pages.

³³ Pál Gedeon, "Nyugat-Európa járőrszalagon," (Budapest: Országos Béketanács, 1952), 12. Hereafter cited as Gedeon, "Nyugat-Európa járőrszalagon." Translation mine.

³⁴ György Magos, *Az angol és amerikai monopoltőke szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszállásában*, (Budapest: Művelt Nép, 1953), 51. Hereafter cited as Magos, *Az angol és amerikai monopoltőke szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszállásában*. Translation mine.

Boldizsár discusses “how the United States, a power fighting Hitler’s fascism in the World War II, became the hotbed of new fascism.”³⁵ Drawing this kind of parallel between Hitler’s Germany and the United States was a really serious accusation less than ten years after Hitler’s final defeat. Another similar quotation from Gedeon, with the same message: “American imperialists are on Hitler's way, they are following Hitler's methods and they intend to set the world on fire as Hitler did.”³⁶ The connection between fascism and American culture was found here as well: “American rubbish literature glorifying murder and aggression has infested Western Europe. One of their main target is the youth. [...] American imperialists follow in Hitler's track here as well, whose major propagandist, Goebbels publicly announced: ‘when I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun.’”³⁷ Concerning *Az angol és amerikai monopoltőke szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszilárdításában*, the association between the United States and fascism is evident from the title, however it deals with the interwar years. Moreover Magos does not fail to emphasize the economic relation between the United States and the Nazi Germany: “The golden rain of American dollar inseminated the heavy industry, especially the military industry of Hitler's Germany. German military potential was rebuilt on American millions of dollar, thus enabling Hitler's attack in Europe.”³⁸ Later the author claims that the US was keeping contact with the fascist even during World War II.³⁹

Associating the United States with fascism proves to be another widely used means in the hands of the author as the mouthpiece of the communist dictatorship. The authors were creatively applying this pattern of anti-American propaganda for any activity of the United States.

³⁵ Boldizsár, *Preface*, 6. Translation mine.

³⁶ Gedeon, “Nyugat-Európa járőrszalagon,” 20.

³⁷ Gedeon, “Nyugat-Európa járőrszalagon,” 13.

³⁸ Magos, *Az angol és amerikai monopoltőke szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszilárdításában*, 90.

³⁹ Magos, *Az angol és amerikai monopoltőke szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszilárdításában*, 103.

3.1.3. Constant Attempt to Emerge to World Power

Although it is quite evident that during the Cold War both sides of the bipolar world would have preferred to gain leadership and spread its own philosophy throughout the world and at the same time prevent the other from doing so, another main motif of the communist propaganda was the evil attempt to occupy the whole world *and terminate the peaceful existence* of the socialist countries. The original Soviet plan and the propaganda are rather contradictory, still communist literature was strongly emphasizing the US imperialist attempts.

Iván Boldizsár's prologue claims that "the Marshall Plan was the means, by which the leading circles of the United States tried to achieve their plans for world power."⁴⁰ The early Cold War communist rhetoric regarded the post-war aid of the United States, the Marshall Plan, a plan to take control over countries that accepted the aid, thus achieving its evil goal of obtaining world power. It does not take too much effort to find almost the same sentence in Pál Gedeon's text: "The Marshall Plan is not the plan of a peaceful restoration, but that of war preparations."⁴¹ The whole work is about what setbacks (misery, unemployment, homelessness) the American occupation and the introduction of the Marshall Plan caused in Western European countries. Moreover the author of "Nyugat-Európa járószalagon" associates the United States with an octopus that annexes and suffocates the Western European countries in order to realize its aims for world power.⁴² "Merénylet az emberiség ellen" describes the United States as "obsessed with conquering policy [and] do not even care if they terribly endanger the whole world."⁴³ These examples proved how the Marshall Plan and the post- World War II American foreign policy was explained to serve the communist anti-American propaganda, but Magos set the same pattern in World War I context and

⁴⁰ Boldizsár, *Preface*, 6. Translation mine.

⁴¹ Gedeon, "Nyugat-Európa járószalagon," 8.

⁴² Gedeon, "Nyugat-Európa járószalagon," 3.

⁴³ "Merénylet az emberiség ellen: Az amerikai imperialista gonosztevők baktériumháborúja," 3.

explained the American imperialist attempts from economic point of view: "The American imperialism has been stimulated by the need for acquiring the maximal profit to make attempts again and again for achieving economic world power. [...] The United States was counting on knocking out its most dangerous rivals, England, France, Germany, seize the foreign markets, the raw material base of the world and acquire world leadership."⁴⁴

As the pattern of the American evil attempt to suppress the whole world and become a single leader is present in each of the four texts in similar form, it can doubtlessly be regarded as a prescription of the communist anti-American ideology.

3.1.4. US Anti-Communist Attitude that is Condemned to Failure

Constant references can be traced in the 1950s Hungarian literature to the fear of the United States' anti-communist attitude. The fear is rooted – allegedly – in America's frequent sabotage attempts against the peaceful socialist societies. It is important to note that in this respect the US aggressor would seem not only dangerous, but more powerful as well, while the Soviet bloc would seem not only peaceful, but undefended and weak at the same time, which is not the image the communist leadership intended to present. That is why in most cases such references automatically bring along a reference to the courage and power of the laborers of communist peoples, that prevents the aggressor from subduing them.

Iván Boldizsár writes on the fear of the Soviet bloc: "They [the United States] have roped in the fascist trash who had fled from free countries [...] and at the same time they make the congress vote for raising dollars to accomplish spy and sabotage acts against the Soviet Union and the people's democracies."⁴⁵ By claiming so, he hints at the official judgment of those who left Hungary after the World War II to avoid the setbacks of communism. The text of "Merénylet az emberiség ellen" starts with the following lines: "The

⁴⁴ Magos, *Az angol és amerikai monopolitőke szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszilárdításában*, 5-6.

⁴⁵ Boldizsár, *Preface*, 23. Translation mine.

American imperialists, after having failed in their plans one after the other, launched germ war. [...] Truman and his accomplices hope to break the resistance of the heroic Korean people. However their calculations will fail!"⁴⁶ This is the same message used in the context of the Korean War. It is even more interesting how Pál Gedeon uses this pattern in his writing about the situation of the Western European countries, which accepted the assistance of the Marshall plan and belong to the other, non-communist pole of the world. Gedeon describes the governments of these countries as traitors, who cooperate with the evil US, while the people – especially the laborers – are described as helpless victims of American imperialist attempts. In this way, the author is able to apply the same pattern to Western Europe as well: "The rage of the Western European governments, listening to commands from Washington, is aimed at the most committed fighters for the issue of peace, the communists. The strategies of terror campaigns against communist parties and democratic mass organizations are worked out in Washington [...]."⁴⁷ A few pages later he adds: "Peoples of Western Europe led by communists, who acquired rich fighting experience during the war against the Nazi invaders, are today persistently fighting [...] against the American occupation that replaced Hitler's captivity."⁴⁸

György Magos built the pattern of US anti-communist attitude into his description of the interwar economic policy of Hungary: "brutal hatred, which exploiters of each country foster against Bolsheviks, attracted Horthy and his company to the United States [for economic assistance to consolidate Hungary]."⁴⁹ Later György Magos cites Stalin's thoughts "[it was] 'rotten consolidation that grows from rotten soil.' Rotten consolidation led to inescapable bankruptcy in Hungary as well as in the entire Europe."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ "Merénylet az emberiség ellen: Az amerikai imperialista gonosztevők baktériumháborúja," 3.

⁴⁷ Gedeon, "Nyugat-Európa járőrszalagon," 16.

⁴⁸ Gedeon, "Nyugat-Európa járőrszalagon," 19.

⁴⁹ Magos, *Az angol és amerikai monopólió szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszilárdításában*, 16.

⁵⁰ Magos, *Az angol és amerikai monopólió szerepe a Horthy-fasizmus megszilárdításában*, 72.

Based on the excerpts above it can be stated that the pattern of US anti-communist attitude and its inherent failure is also a recurring theme in the 1950s communist propaganda. However applied differently, the same image is used in each of the four texts, which proves that the motif was the part of the official rhetoric.

An explicitly anti-American and centrally guided language is revealed to the reader from the four writings analyzed above. They clearly reflect the exclusive domination of Marxist ideology, as the texts apply an extremely harsh and hostile tone to express the official views of the communist countries. The quotes above and a number of other similar words and expressions– such as the recurring adjectival phrase: imperialist America – prove that in the early 1950s, at the peak of the cold war, literature published in communist countries was infiltrated by the obligatory aggressive attitude towards the United States.

3.2. The 1960s

The revolution of 1956 brought significant political, cultural and economic changes to Hungary. Although it was violently beaten down and a period of fierce retaliation followed, the communist leadership realized that the return to the previous Stalinist policy was not possible any more. One party system remained with the leadership of János Kádár, the first person of the Hungarian Socialist Labor Party,⁵¹ but from the early 1960s the repression by the dictatorship started to ease to a certain extent. Such spheres of life as economy, education, science and culture received some autonomy, however the unquestionable hegemony of the Hungarian Socialist Labor Party and the loyalty to the Soviet foreign and military policy remained as restrictive forces. Taboo topics, as 1956, the multi-party system and the real role of the Soviet Union could not be mentioned neither in literature nor in other forms of art, nor in everyday conversation.⁵² Hungary was still depending on Moscow, but not to the same extent as in the early 1950s. Since the Soviet Union was not able to maintain its policy of self-supply within the eastern bloc, Hungarian economy gradually needed to open up for the United States. A significant step forward is marked by the 1963 amnesty, which was officially granted to the political prisoners of the communist system. From that time on more and more people were allowed to travel abroad and even American scholarship programs became available (Ford, IREX). Slow but steady changes started in the field of publishing. The reorganization of fine literature started in 1955. "More publishers were allowed to operate [...] the publishers' lectors could take more responsibility (if they dared) [...]"⁵³ In this way Hungarian literature became more free, more open, however remained within the framework of the nationalized system of art.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, 399.

⁵² Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, 494.

⁵³ "A háború után: a század második fele." Translation mine.

⁵⁴ "A háború után: a század második fele." Translation mine.

In the meantime the United States also experienced important changes. The 1960s brought the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, later the sexual revolution. The conflict in Vietnam reached its climax. John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were all assassinated because of political reasons.

This was the political background for László Helon and Iván Boldizsár to write about the United States. László Helon – which is a pseudonym for Tibor Keszthelyi – spent years in the US around the late 1950s and the early 1960s (the exact date of his visit was not stated in his travelogue), while Iván Boldizsár – the author of “Az amerikai imperializmus útja és eszközei, Előszó helyett” analyzed under chapter "1950s" – gave the purpose and the precise date of his travel: Ford Foundation scholarship, March 14 - July 15, 1966. Helon's travelogue, *Felfedeztem Amerikát* was published as early as 1966, Boldizsár's *New York percről percre* was released in 1971. Both of the travelogues show clear parallel with the politics of the time. Although the books echo the socialist ideologies of the Kádár era much less strikingly than the previous texts, certain recurring elements can be traced, around which the travelogues are organized. Their tone and rhetoric, however, cannot be associated with the ones from the 1950s, since Helon and Boldizsár here compose in a moderate or even friendly way carefully hiding the compulsory thoughts in the details. They try to create an illusion that they are allowed to write anything they intend to, without fear from censorship, however the returning themes echoing the same thoughts many times prove that the authors had to keep to a certain central guideline reflecting the official stand of the socialist Hungary. The importance of these recurring themes lies in their frequency: they emphasize only the negative sides of the United States. The most frequent such themes are the dissolution of illusions created about the USA, violence, immorality, corruption, the power of dollar, racism, low quality culture, unbearable living conditions and the superiority of socialism. It is important to note that Boldizsár makes

frequent references to setbacks of the Vietnam War as well, which Helon does not do, since during his visit the anti-Vietnam War public sentiment could not be felt so strong as in 1966.

3.2.1. Illusions

The opinion of everyday Hungarian people and the official communist view of the United States hardly coincided. For Hungarians – although some became disillusioned after the revolution of 1956 – the United States represented liberty and a kind of inaccessible lifestyle that a lot of Hungarians were longing for. Since it was endangering the image of the socialist system, it was important for the official ideology to counterbalance this notion as much as possible. That is why Helon and Boldizsár keep emphasizing the *fact* that any positive and attractive feature about the American life is only an illusion, a surface under which something rotten hides. László Helon introduces his travelogue with these thoughts:

[By my school years I had created an image of the US]: fresh world of case-hardened redskins, even morally disheveled gold miners, strong-fisted colonists, cowboys in checked shirts, revolver heroes playing poker and slowly speaking sheriffs. [Later]: I supposed it is the home of wild west intellectuals in ribbon ties, oil wells growing as forests of mushroom, industrial companies growing up at *cancer* speed, millionaires emerging day after day, rocket career movie stars, limitless possibilities. It seemed a giant of goodwill that grows an inch with every stretching. I still saw only the romantic plaster of the social construction. Chicago gangsters smoking cigars, overhead railways lumbering above mansions, jazz, illuminating towers of skyscrapers, commending bubbling of American English: as fine oil would be flushing from the well of soul... [...] Then came the political ice age. The image of America changed: the American eagle transformed in my mind to a griffin carrying atomic bomb in its claws. The whizz of its wings was only outvoiced probably by the irresponsible clang of the witch hunter senator, McCarthy. As Alice in the tale I stepped beyond the mirror: the *swampy world* of Ku-Klux-Klan, hysterical fear of communism, the almighty dollar, unemployment propagating as cane forests, racism revealed for me.⁵⁵

This passage summarizes the public perception of the time about the United States and at the same time presents the main theses of the communist anti-American propaganda. It is clear that the violent, warlike rhetoric of the early 1950s eased, but the basic conceptions, such as violence, racism/fascism, power of the dollar and low quality of life remained.

⁵⁵ László Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, (Budapest: Kossuth, 1966), 12. Hereafter cited as Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*. Italics mine. Translation mine.

More moderate tone is used by Boldizsár when he briefly sums up his experiences of the whole American society as an illusion: "Most Americans invariably believe and adore the happy American thesis, and not willing to acknowledge anything that contradicts this."⁵⁶ The same conception is expressed by Helon, when he writes that "the life of the American family glitters in illusory light [...]. The sparkling of their lives are not that of diamond, but that of glass bijou, that cracks into thousand pieces after a sudden hit."⁵⁷

Dissolving illusions undoubtedly served the interests of the communist propaganda. Attempts to manipulate the perception of the public by distorting facts used the thesis of illusions. In such way both American and Hungarian public was charged with believing in the fake image of American welfare, and failing to recognize the scam behind it.

3.2.2. Crime and Violence

The United States was always presented in the socialist Hungary as a dissipated country, characterized by a general barbaric lifestyle. Although in the 1960s crime rates of the US were still relatively low (slightly increasing from 5.0 of the 1950s to 5.9 per 1000 people⁵⁸), the authors of the 1960s' travelogues did not fail to emphasize the violent attitude of the American society and the frequent crimes as a result of this feature.

The author of *Felfedeztem Amerikát* informs that in the American films "it is allowed to kill brutally, to murder, to brutalize, to display the stories of renowned criminal cases with the details of a documentary."⁵⁹ Later he claims that even children's programs contain violence,⁶⁰ and he relates the whole problem of television violence to the issue of capitalist economy by claiming: "Doing something against this would certainly require digging deep:

⁵⁶ Iván Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1971), 103. Hereafter cited as Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*. Translation mine.

⁵⁷ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 89. Translation mine.

⁵⁸ Morgan O. Reynolds, *Crime and Punishment in America* (Dallas: NCPA Policy Report No. 193, 1995), accessed April 6, 2013, <http://www.ncpa.org/pdfs/st193.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 151. Translation mine. Italics mine.

⁶⁰ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 170. Translation mine.

this would bring along the restriction of the freedom of private capital. And this seems too large price."⁶¹ Helon drew a direct parallel between violence and capitalism, as they would necessarily go hand in hand. He also supported his claim by similar observations about American sports: "Boxing matches, professional all-in-wrestling and rugby matches are the most broadcasted [sports]. Here players are pummeling each other – while in bowling, golf and baseball fields [they are pummeling] skittles and balls."⁶² For describing films he cumulates different words meaning almost the same, thus emphasizing and supporting his statement. His thoughts about sports clearly explains the communist anti-American rhetoric ie. presenting everything from only one, exclusively negative point of view. This idea makes the writer possible to present such sports as golf or bowling as aggressive and violent.

Another side of the issue that perfectly fits in socialist propaganda is crime. It is impossible for a country with such a vast area to avoid crime, but the 1960s, especially around the turn of the decade, the crime rates in the US were not outstandingly high. However *Felfedeztem Amerikát* contains several references to criminal acts. He uses the motif of the mafia to support his truth. Helon devotes long chapters to describe criminal cases and dangers of American society, with the titles of "Al Capone's sons..."⁶³ and "... and grandsons."⁶⁴ He elaborates on the more and more frequent street attacks and highlights that the most probable victims of these crimes are women or even young girls, so "women returning home in evening hours equip themselves with various self-defense tools."⁶⁵ As another argument for poor public security, the author shares a firsthand experience with the reader. "One of her classmates took away the breakfast of my French colleagues' little daughter on her way to school by pushing a small pocket-knife against the stomach of the girl."⁶⁶ Claiming to know

⁶¹ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 170. Translation mine.

⁶² Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 168. Translation mine.

⁶³ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 322. Translation mine.

⁶⁴ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 329. Translation mine.

⁶⁵ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 329. Translation mine.

⁶⁶ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 330. Translation mine.

somebody – especially an undefended little girl – who has been attacked is a really persuasive form of propaganda, which is widely used by socialist authors writing about the US. Helon attributes the problem of security to capitalism that makes both the well-off children/people and the poor ones bored and *indifferent*.⁶⁷

Crime and violence are extremely emphasized all through Iván Boldizsár's *New York percről percre* as well. The author also devotes a whole chapter to violence and crime in his *New York percről percre* with the title: "An axiom about violence."⁶⁸ Throughout his travelogue Boldizsár keeps on repeating that it is extremely dangerous to walk in New York in the evening. In many cases he writes this as if some American personally called his attention to this fact. It also increases the persuasive force of the statement. Moreover Boldizsár is able to bring up an even more personal experience of a street hold-up: "[...] two striplings stood facing me and asked me what time it was in a way that I immediately said good bye to my watch and blessed my carefulness that I had only five dollars in my pocket, but I pitied my old leather wallet... a police car stopped, the two guys ran away [...]"⁶⁹ At the very beginning of his book the author provides a really detailed description of a robbery attempt in a bookstore – where of course he was personally present. The attempt failed since the storekeeper brutally whipped the young robber with a truncheon.⁷⁰ The conclusion of the author: in the US even a bookstore keeper – who is supposed to be intelligent and modest – is so violent that he is willing to keep a truncheon – "a stodgy means of vigilantism"⁷¹ – with him to punish the thieves. However pornography is not an issue of crime and violence, Boldizsár found the link between them: "[pornographic books] don't stop at pornography, but they link it to violence."⁷²

⁶⁷ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 332. Translation mine. Italics mine.

⁶⁸ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 80. Translation mine.

⁶⁹ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 167. Translation mine.

⁷⁰ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 36. Translation mine.

⁷¹ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 37. Translation mine.

⁷² Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 112. Translation mine.

Commenting on the attitude of Americans towards Vietnam War is another hobbyhorse of Iván Boldizsár, however the issue is not hinted on by Helon. The reason for this is the time gap between the visits of the two authors. At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s – when Helon was staying in the US – the conflict in Vietnam was still to face its worst days. However Boldizsár's 1966 visit – and 1971 publication of his *New York percről percre* – coincided with the deepening crisis of the Vietnam war and the emerging public opposition against it. That's why *New York percről percre* contains frequent references to the *aggression* Americans commit in Vietnam. The writer frequently mentions the indifferent behavior he experiences from Americans in connection with Vietnam. He describes their attitude as: “Americans don’t regard Vietnam war a war. They don’t want to think of – no: they simply don’t think of – the facts that American boys die there; what is more unbearable for humans, American boys kill other people.”⁷³ In another page: “I mostly experienced insensitivity and *indifference*, when talking about Vietnam.”⁷⁴ He mentions several times that while Hungarians are worrying about the war in Vietnam and its effect on the peaceful relations between the communist block and the United States, the Americans do not care about it at all, because they have never experienced war on their land. Although *Felfedeztem Amerikát* does not comment on Vietnam war, the American attitude of indifference is stressed by Helon as well.

Authors paying so much attention to violence and crime in both travelogues is an evidence that this pattern reflected the voice of the official socialist rhetoric of the time. Motifs and themes coincide – even if Helon's book does not feature the issue of Vietnam war – to such an extent that it can only be the result of a guided framework. Both of the writers are eager to support their claims with personal examples, which can also be regarded a habitual pattern of persuasion in socialist travel literature on the US.

⁷³ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 66. Translation mine.

⁷⁴ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 290. Translation mine. Italics mine.

3.2.3. Immorality, Corruption and the Power of the Dollar

The basic tenet behind these issues was the following: in contrast with the socialist political order, whose motto was loudly shouting "everything is for the people, for the laborer," capitalist US was accused of ignoring the actual needs of its people, focusing only on profit making and cumulating large amounts of money. Naturally the given political system in Hungary did not make it possible for everyday people to make their own profit, the pattern of unethical materialist society was used to deter (with debatable success) Hungarians from longing for such freedom. Helon's and Boldizsár's travelogues – especially the former's – abound in such examples.

László Helon's *Felfedeztem Amerikát* defines the power of dollar: "the dollar bill is the sheepskin of the New World." It refers to the assumption that in the capitalist America all that counts is money with which everything is possible, no matter how unethical it is. An example is brought for this claim: the only aim of foundations and charity organizations is not to help others, but to evade taxes.⁷⁵ It is strongly emphasized, since the writer repeats this at least three times throughout his book. However the most emphasized focus of *Felfedeztem Amerikát* is the setbacks of consumerism, the exploitation of the unsuspecting masses. Within only twenty pages, the immorality of advertising and the overall atmosphere of the consumer society is summed up really briefly, by four similar sentences (naturally they are detailed later): (1) "[...] advertising agencies are the guides of the taste of the US, the *dictators* of thoughts."⁷⁶ On the same page: (2) "The *terrible machinery* of advertising works not for the consumers, but for the producers [...]."⁷⁷ Later the advertising is described as "psychological

⁷⁵ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 240. Translation mine.

⁷⁶ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 61. Translation mine. Italics mine.

⁷⁷ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 61. Translation mine. Italics mine.

warfare"⁷⁸ and "modern war *against consumers*"⁷⁹ The rhetoric the author uses to present the negative features of the phenomenon is that of a war that intends to destroy the enemies, the American laborers. The text uses striking militaristic expressions – creating and implying a conspiracy theory – therefore the concept of consumerism appears to be an immoral evil machinery. Helon also devotes chapters to reveal the corruption of the American media to the readers. On the one hand he highlights how media use different kind of tricks to manipulate public opinion (by carefully selecting what news are to be emphasized and what are to be hidden) while keeping the illusion of "fake objectivity."⁸⁰ (It proves to be really ironical in this context, since this is the very trick the writer himself uses to influence public opinion.)

General wasteful attitude is also mentioned in Helon's travelogue as an unethical, negative feature of American society, but the issue is largely detailed in Boldizsár's *New York percről percre*. The author says: "waste is one of the most important factors of American life. They are used to it to such an extent that they can't even live without it, and they say that it increases the continuity and income of industry and trade, so finally increases the national income."⁸¹ In this way Boldizsár attributes the prosperity of the United States to this unacceptable habit, thus demoralizing the source of its wealth. He also connects this phenomenon to the central role of money and to the fact that people cannot value anything in life but money. "I have found myself in a country, where every value is expressed by money [...]"⁸² This sentence clearly echoes the same ideas as Boldizsár's thesis on the power of money did. With the word value, Boldizsár refers to any human virtue that are kept in high importance, however not by the Americans – even of friendship he claims that it is not as honest in the US as in Hungary.

⁷⁸ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 73. Translation mine. Italics mine.

⁷⁹ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 77. Translation mine. Italics mine.

⁸⁰ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 132. Translation mine.

⁸¹ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 296-297. Translation mine.

⁸² Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 104. Translation mine.

By claiming that money is the most significant value in American life, the authors present a demoralized society, where not a single human feeling matters, only the dollar is able to achieve everything. This general theory of the socialist propaganda drives the writers to conclude that corruption of the media, scam of the society and even wasteful habits stem from this materialistic attitude.

3.2.4. Racism

The topic of racism seems one of the most effective trump cards of the socialist anti-American rhetoric. It is important to consider that László Helon stayed in the US in the late 1950s, early 1960s. He eyewitnessed the Civil Rights Movement, the African-American's protests against segregation and the controversial handling of the issue in American society. Iván Boldizsár arrived to the US in 1966, the same year when Helon's *Felfedeztem Amerikát* was published. Although the Civil Rights Act was issued in 1964, the problem of racism was indeed on the agenda at the time of the authors' visits. However it must be mentioned as a propagandistic motif of socialist writing, since the issue is emphasized in a way that it follows the pattern of the 'American fascism' concept of the early 1950s.

László Helon draws an extreme parallel between the southern states and hell when writing about the reconciliation between religion and racism: "Segregation, the laws of racial separation are not valid in *hell* – but valid here in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and other similar states."⁸³ In this way he presents the southern states even more evil than hell. In another passage: "It [Harlem] is a ghetto – without stonewall, wire fence and guards."⁸⁴ It is – however indirect, but – an explicit reference to the holocaust, thus to fascism.

Boldizsár uses even more direct and more aggressive tone: "Police officers are patrolling in the city [Harlem], like the SS were patrolling in some French or Norwegian

⁸³ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 283. Translation mine. Italics mine.

⁸⁴ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 276. Translation mine.

cities. In every minute, they are ready to *shoot*, to *beat*, to floor, to arrest, because every minute they are afraid of being attacked."⁸⁵

References to the similarities between fascism and the American society are present in the works of both authors. Although not directly accusing the United States of being fascist as in the early 1950s, the parallel they create is unambiguous. Helon once even hints at the concept that "the World War II was Hitler's special present [for the US]. It not only supplied the industry with orders and swallowed up unemployment, but also created opportunity for well profiting capital investments."⁸⁶ It clearly reflects the propaganda of the 1950s.

The importance of using the racist issue for destroying the image of the United States lies in its association with Hitler's fascism, which is a serious accusation that still echoed the voice of the early 1950s' anti-American Cold War propaganda.

3.2.5. Low Quality Culture

Another important means for the socialist propaganda to degrade the US was culture. It stemmed from the fact that the history of the United States is short, so the image of a rootless society that lacks any traditional values was presented in socialist writings.

Felfedeztem Amerikát presents a stereotyped American: "The shocking anti-intellectualism of Americans roots from [...] this peculiar historical set. They look at the sophisticated intellect with a mixture of inferiority complex and contempt."⁸⁷ This telling sentence sets the scene for later conclusions. The primitive, "unmannerly"⁸⁸ American people, who are not able to do anything with intellect, are also described as a mass "without strong sense of national unity"⁸⁹. Taking such stereotype as the basis for his argument, the author creates a similar picture of American culture. The favorite attribute of the author, repeated

⁸⁵ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 470. Translation mine. Italics mine.

⁸⁶ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 25. Translation mine.

⁸⁷ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 24. Translation mine.

⁸⁸ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 32. Translation mine.

⁸⁹ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 26. Translation mine.

almost on each page is "undemanding." This is what he in most cases uses for describing different aspects of American culture. "[American film industry] serially produces cheap and dreadfully *undemanding* movies [...]. The *undemanding* features of the designs can only be exceeded by the dullness of the ideas."⁹⁰ Kitsch is another highly emphasized characteristic feature of American culture: "the gilded national traditions [e.g. pioneer life] has been substituted by kitsch in Hollywood – the business interests of which is based on immature taste – in the editorial offices of booklet novels and in the comic columns of daily papers."⁹¹ The travelogue mentions conformism several times that creates a "mediocre,"⁹² "uniformed"⁹³ way of life. Moreover Helon degrades the ongoing cultural trend of the Beat Generation. He explains through pages how beat culture became corrupted and finally became a cheap fashion. "This is how the rebellion of American angry young men ended. It initially included social criticism, but in the core of it was not the human, but the redemption of poetry and painting for their own sake. In this way it could degenerate to nothing else but real youth crime in the fields of literature and arts."⁹⁴

It is interesting that Boldizsár's review on American culture consists of the very same items. He expresses that he only found low quality literature in bookstores,⁹⁵ met narrow-minded, naive, obtuse Americans.⁹⁶ "In America there is no folk culture"⁹⁷ that simply means the lack of roots and unity. The text also brings examples for kitsch: "The over-ornamented fake Renaissance murals and other accessories of the room nauseate me."⁹⁸ Conformism is explained as the illusion of being different, however actually being the same.⁹⁹ And his opinion about the beat culture also reflects extreme similarity to that of Helon's. Boldizsár

⁹⁰ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 148. Translation mine. Italics mine.

⁹¹ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 49. Translation mine.

⁹² Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 116. Translation mine.

⁹³ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 116. Translation mine.

⁹⁴ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 355. Translation mine.

⁹⁵ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 35. Translation mine.

⁹⁶ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 193. Translation mine.

⁹⁷ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 232. Translation mine.

⁹⁸ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 182. Translation mine.

⁹⁹ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 413. Translation mine.

claims to have seen Allen Ginsberg, poet of the Beat Generation. "Ginsburg [sic], the American, sit there wearing thrummed sleeved clothes, unmatched socks, and sandals in spite of the cool weather, naturally without a tie."¹⁰⁰ Moreover the author – who cannot even spell the name of the poet correctly – compares the artist to a neat Soviet young man sitting next to Ginsberg. The reference is obvious: Boldizsár degrades beat culture by simplifying it to a superficial stereotype i.e. a crew of sluggards with beggar-like appearance.

The 1960s was the period when Hungarian socialist leaders realized the need for American economic assistance, but at the same time they were afraid of the infiltration of American pop culture to Hungary. In this way – besides trying to avoid the importation of American culture to Hungary – they did their best to persuade Hungarians about the poor quality of it. The beat culture anyway must have seemed too subversive in a strict socialist order, so any sympathizing with it was definitely to be suppressed in Hungary. The perfect concordance of the two travelogues in Cultural issues proves to be the result of a guided central order from the socialist leadership.

3.2.6. Decaying Cityscape and Depressing Living Conditions

Both the author of *Felfedeztem Amerikát...* and that of *New York percről percre* frequently remarks how depressing the life and the surroundings of the Americans are. They often give examples for decaying buildings or simply for unaesthetic features of the cities. Moreover neither Helon nor Boldizsár failed to emphasize the problem of unemployment and poverty in the United States. However unemployment rate was kept on to a minimum (2-5%)¹⁰¹ in the 1960s and poverty rate had started a steady decrease since the 1959 climax of

¹⁰⁰ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 268. Translation mine.

¹⁰¹ "US Unemployment," Economy Watch, October 14, 2010, accessed April 6, 2013, <http://www.economywatch.com/unemployment/countries/united-states.html>.

22.4%.¹⁰² For that segment of the American society which did not suffer from financial problems, the authors used the motif of insecurity i.e. the constant fear of losing everything, going bankrupt.

Helon, writing about the furnishing of huge blocks of flat, expresses *his opinion* on the surroundings as well: "*Congestion* of city streets, lack of green, *dreariness* of corridors isolated from sunlight, *hardness* of all-concrete surroundings are tried to counterbalance [...]"¹⁰³ Later he describes the Metropolitan Opera with the following expressions: "strikingly distasteful, red bricked, dirty walled building. [...] Well I was disillusioned [...] by the interior of the Opera: *worn-out* wooden parapets of the staircase, *untended* drapes, walls *in need of painting* – which are tried to disguise with weak light – are rather disillusioning. Although he is not talking about run-down areas in the examples above, he intends to create an atmosphere of an overall decay by listing attributes with negative connotation. It is not surprising that the situation of laborers is depicted in a much harsher way, with the images of "binding laborers to the land" (direct reference to the dependent state of serfs in feudalism), "alarmingly impoverished settlement" or "misery."¹⁰⁴ The life of the more well-off members of the American society is illustrated by the "castle of cards"¹⁰⁵ metaphor in *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, which refers to a condition where the possibility of bankruptcy is always in the air. The author relates this phenomenon to the credit system, one of the basic elements of capitalism, and thus the core of the problem is the system itself, which can be blamed for creating such an unbearable atmosphere of uncertainty.

Helon's representations completely correspond with the image depicted by Boldizsár, who repeatedly calls the reader's attention to the ravaged features of New York City. "The

¹⁰²"US Poverty - 1960's Levels" Econfix, September 15, 2010, accessed April 6, 2013, <http://econfix.wordpress.com/2010/09/15/us-poverty-1960s-levels/>.

¹⁰³ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 125. Translation mine. Italics mine.

¹⁰⁴ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 38. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁵ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 89. Translation mine.

dreariness of the New York subway stations *depresses* people.”¹⁰⁶ In another example: “There is a kiosk at the corner of the 7th Avenue. At home [in Hungary] I have last seen such a *shaky* one at the beginning of the 30s.”¹⁰⁷ ‘Dreary’ and ‘shaky’ adjectives occur regularly in Boldizsár’s description of the city. The issue of poverty and unemployment is elaborated by *New York percről percre* as well. Boldizsár claims that “poverty is easier to notice”¹⁰⁸ than luxury. He relates the problem of unemployment to low wages: “Only those do not work, who do not want to. Unemployment benefits in New York [city] is 50 dollar. Unskilled worker earns eighty dollar for a week. Ten- fifteen dollar of this is taken away as tax, a huge amount is spent on transport. It is easier to stay at home, hover about the house, play or drink.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover Boldizsár mentions the “average American citizen” too, who “is getting acquainted with *fear*, anxiety, *insecurity* [...]”.¹¹⁰ In this way the political and economic system is made responsible for the low living standards of laborers and general insecurity – which analogy can be observed in László Helon’s work as well.

Corresponding images of the two travelogues provide evidence for the assumption that the emphasis on decaying cityscapes and hard living conditions of the United States is a central theme in socialist anti-American propaganda. The similarity can be observed in the rhetoric as well, since recurring attributes, such as ‘dreary,’ are frequent in both works.

3.2.7. Justification of Socialist Superiority

Justifying the superiority of socialism over capitalism is another common theme in *Felfedeztem Amerikát* and *New York percről percre*. The authors often supply bases for comparing and contrasting the US with Hungary. The authors’ judgments about American Hungarians also coincides, thus reflecting the official rhetoric of the socialist leadership.

¹⁰⁶ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 127. Translation mine. Italics mine.

¹⁰⁷ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 58. Translation mine. Italics mine.

¹⁰⁸ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 404. Translation mine. Italics mine.

¹⁰⁹ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 337. Translation mine.

¹¹⁰ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 141. Translation mine. Italics mine.

Helon's poetic approach to the contrast between capitalist and socialist systems associates the US economy with an "underweight man suffering from *liver dysfunction*,"¹¹¹ for which the real remedy would be "*surgery – socialist revolution*,"¹¹² but it is refused by the US. In another chapter Helon analyzes the reasons for American fear of communism: "What is behind it? *Ignorance? Malignancy? Fear? Hatered? Antipathy* for their own sake? Misguidance? [...] the one who considers socialism as an enemy of his/her own interests, is afraid of communism. Because s/he is aware of its *power*."¹¹³ By associating communism with positive entities, such as surgical remedy or power for the interests of people, and at the same time attributing only negative characteristics to capitalism, such as illness, negative human features or fear, an atmosphere is created in which socialist system transcends capitalism, thus proving the Eastern bloc's superiority over the United States.

Long pages are devoted to the praise of the achievements of socialism in Iván Boldizsár's travelogue as well. The author writes about the socialist political institution in a majestic way, once even supporting his assumption with a Biblical reference to the thought:

[...] authority and population (in the socialist Hungary) have got so close to each other as very rarely in the past centuries, when the possessors of the power, who themselves are also sons of the people, could say that those who are not against us are with us, and in this way they grafted a Biblical spring into the tree of Marxism, when the coexistence of the two halves of the world was becoming reality every day... the escalation in Vietnam has made further improvements slower and more difficult.¹¹⁴

In this passage Boldizsár expresses that while Hungary is seeking for opportunities for a peaceful future, the United States hinders her efforts by maintaining the conflict in Vietnam and still using a hostile Cold War propaganda. This also supports the writer's conclusion about American ignorance and narrow-mindedness, the *fact* of which provides basis for the author to raise the socialist ethic above the United States. The superiority of the socialist system is also justified with other thoughts: "[...] other juices, which anyway could

¹¹¹ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 64. Translation mine. Italics mine.

¹¹² Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 64. Translation mine. Italics mine.

¹¹³ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 256. Translation mine. Italics mine.

¹¹⁴ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 93-94. Translation mine.

not be compared to the Hungarian peach or quince nectars [...]”¹¹⁵ or “the perspective to the other side, to New Jersey, even if it is not worth the sight of the mountains of Buda, but it may compete with the scenery of the Pest side.”¹¹⁶

Such views were important to be presented in socialist Hungarian travel writing on the US, since in this way the achievements of socialism could be honored, and at the same time contrasted to the American life. The authors managed to prove the superiority of communism by restricting the scope of the evidences to a unilateral socialist view. Highlighting the benefits of socialism (and hiding the setbacks of it) and stressing the negative aspects of the United States was the most important means of persuasion.

The 1960s brought along a significant change in the relations between Hungary and the United States of America. The revolution of 1956 proved for the communist leadership of the time that the Stalinist rigor and inhumane conditions are not possible to maintain any more. The isolationist policy of the Soviet bloc also tended towards failure, especially on the field of economy, which led Hungary to the conclusion that the extreme hostility of the early 1950s towards the US is to be replaced by a more cooperative attitude. The 1963 amnesty granted for the political prisoners of Hungarian communism marked an important milestone in the relationship of the former enemies. Hungary needed American economic help, while the new American plans for gradual mellowing of the socialist systems also benefited from this change. Nevertheless the Hungarian antagonism towards the US was still to be maintained at the ideological level – which received definite assistance from the developed system of supervision of press i.e. censorship. Writing about the US, in this way, served the interests of the official socialist propaganda. Writers – allowed to travel to the US in the framework of increasing scholarship programs – were required to reflect the official ideology

¹¹⁵ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 68. Translation mine.

¹¹⁶ Boldizsár, *New York percről percre*, 15-16. Translation mine.

in their writings. This is the reason why common themes, such as crime and violence, immorality, racism, decaying cityscape, poverty and uncertainty, can be identified in the travelogues of two different writers. Moreover both of them make efforts to justify the superiority of socialism over capitalism. The use of similar motifs and words (e.g. 'dreary') proves that the writing process was centrally guided. The image 1960s socialist literature creates aims to demoralize the US by constantly highlighting the negative sides of the country. This representation – although shares common elements with that of the early 1950s, such as fascism or violence – is much restricted compared to the 1950s' Cold War tone, the accusations they relate to the US is much less explicit, but more disguised between the lines.

3.3. The 1970s and The 1980s

A significant proportion of this chapter will be based on one of my previous papers. "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism: The Role of The 1970s' Hungarian Travel Literature In Communist Anti-American Propaganda", which was my BA thesis, limits its scope to socialist writing about the US in the 1970s. The system of this thesis follows the same pattern as the present one. Since my 2011 research is possible to access in its entire format in the library of the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Debrecen, here I only intend to include a brief summary of that research to provide the chronological order for my paper.

The 1970s brought outstanding success to American-Hungarian relations. This was the decade when the Mindszenty issue was solved (1971), when the financial agreement of 1973 led to the Most Favored Nation agreement (1978) and when the Holy Crown was transported back to Hungary. Moreover the long-lasting international conflict of the Vietnam War was closed by 1973. This atmosphere was beneficial for the cultural relations as well, however this aspect of American-Hungarian relationship was still maintained carefully by the socialist leadership because of the fear from the American policy of mellowing. That is why the ideological level of the anti-American socialist propaganda still characterized the decade and lasted indeed up to the system change of 1989. "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism" analyzes the presence of the official propaganda in socialist writings on the United States on the basis of three travelogues: (1) Tamás Vitray: *Amerikai mozaik* [American Mosaic], published in 1972; (2) István Kovács: *Nászágy és koporsó* [Wedding Bed and Coffin], published in 1977 and (3) Gyula Koltai: *Nem mind fénylik, ami Amerika* [Not All Glitters That Is America], published in 1981. The research distinguishes three main themes around which the socialist image making about the US is aligned: (1) "USA, the Homeland of

Crime"; (2) "The Country Where Life Is Unbearable"; (3) "Kings of Immorality."¹¹⁷ These chapter titles show great resemblance to the themes and motifs of the 1960s' socialist writings. The reason for this is that the 1970s' travelogues deployed almost the same arsenal of ideological weapons against the US as the those of the 1960s did. The differences derive from the relevant momentums of the changing US history. Constantly increasing crime rates, the Energy Crisis in the early years of the decade and the Watergate scandal did not favored the image of the United States, but at the same time provided excellent raw material for socialist anti-American propaganda.

The USA was presented as "the homeland of crime."¹¹⁸ The travelogues emphasized the significant presence of violence and crime in the 1970s' United States. The authors write about instances of street crimes and the dangers of walking in the US streets alone. Two of the authors (Vitray and Koltai) include personal experience about street hold-ups, while the third, Kovács explains the cruelty of the Arizona mafia.¹¹⁹ "[...] in these writings the dark side is emphasized exclusively, which also creates a distorted image. As a consequence, it can be stated that emphasizing the high criminal rates and sometimes lacking public security was one of the tools in the hands of the communist authority to frighten people away from the American way of life and even to create hostility towards the country."¹²⁰

Unbearable living conditions, a familiar topic of the 1960s, gained large emphasis in the travelogues of the 1970s as well: "The authors talk about huge masses living under poverty level, they repeatedly mention that those who still have jobs are in constant fear of unemployment and work extremely hard to make a living, and they also criticize the poor

¹¹⁷ Zsófia Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism: The Role of The 1970s' Hungarian Travel Literature In Communist Anti-American Propaganda" (BA Thesis, University of Debrecen, 2011). Hereafter cited as, Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

¹¹⁸ Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

¹¹⁹ Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

¹²⁰ Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

cityscapes."¹²¹ Although the three travelogues approach the issue from three different points of view, the similar motifs appear with each authors. Vitray uses the most moderate tone, nevertheless the "negative atmosphere"¹²² is created in his work as well. " Since *Nem mind fénylik, ami Amerika* focuses on social issues, the reader comes across a large number of examples concerning poverty or living standards. Koltai uses an extremely harsh and hostile tone to describe the living standard, the cityscapes and the everyday life of the United States. One can find references to the hardships and disadvantages of American life in almost every page, composed with incredible negativity."¹²³ István Kovács supports his argument in *Nászágó és koporsó* with racial issues, devoting "an entire chapter to the situation of Native Americans."¹²⁴ In addition he also degrades the intelligence rates of the American people thus echoing the 1960s' image of the stereotyped American.

The issue of immorality was introduced in "The United States Through the Lens of Socialism" in a way that also resembles much to the anti-American propaganda of the 1960s:

The third important stereotype about the USA, created by the communist rhetoric of the travelogues is that the United States is corrupt, dishonest, unjust, manipulative and lacks moral values. The prevailing image in the books is that life in the US is all about money and political power, no matter what sacrifices needed. The authors managed to make effective summaries in this field as well. Although they actually had raw material for the topic, the emphasis was always on the darkest side of the issue. Readers can hardly come across positive accounts on the economic, social and political life of the USA, but they are bombarded with facts supporting corruption and immorality. We do not have to question the truth value of the things written, but we have to take into consideration the imbalanced ratio of negative and positive accounts and the use of language.¹²⁵

A new issue under the egis of immorality appears in the 1970s i.e. pornography. László Helon still talks about an America in the early 1960s as a "*prudish* country, daintily paying attention to morality, [where] *strict censorship* guards over civil morals."¹²⁶ Words 'prudish' and 'censorship' definitely bear negative connotation in this context. Less than ten years later –

¹²¹ Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

¹²² Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

¹²³ Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

¹²⁴ Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

¹²⁵ Madácsi, "The United States Through The Lens of Socialism."

¹²⁶ Helon, *Felfedeztem Amerikát*, 151. Translation mine. Italics mine.

which span of time was enough for the US lay the foundations of the sexual revolution – the American society was whipped for explicit and disgusting pornography by the socialist writers. Although the topic was hinted on by Iván Boldizsár in *New York percről percre*, the 1970s' travelogues – especially that of Vitray's – explained its demoralizing effects in details. Koltai, echoing the same thoughts as Helon, long wrote about the setbacks of consumerism and the immorality of "mass manipulation."¹²⁷

Socialist writing about the United States does not show remarkable changes after the 1960s. They were repeating similar thoughts adjusted to the recent trends and historic changes. Although the tone remained similar, a constant easing tendency can be observed with the passing of time. As the examples "The United States Through the Lens of Socialism: The Role of The 1970s' Hungarian Travel Literature In Communist Anti-American Propaganda" prove, harsh overtones, such as of associating the US with fascism, gradually faded away and muted by the end of the 1980s.

¹²⁷ Koltai, *Nem mind fénylik, ami Amerika*, 92. Translation mine.

4. Outlook

The topic of the present thesis raises issues, which are out of the scope of this paper, but would be worth elaborating on in further research. One of such issues is the public perception of the United States in the socialist Hungary, which is – in many cases – in sharp contrast with the image created by the official voice of socialist leadership. The other one is the changes in Hungarian writing about the US after the system change of 1989, focusing on the similarities and contrasts with the socialist writing.

4.1. Public Perception of the United States in the Socialist Hungary

Until 1956 relations between the United States and Hungary were kept on the minimum. Even economic connections suffered extreme limitations, political and cultural exchange of thoughts were completely illegal. The only way of leaking information to Hungary from beyond the Iron Curtain was radio. Radio Free Europe, Voice of America and BBC were intending to "break the information monopoly of the communist dictatorship"¹²⁸ and hinder brainwashing. This notwithstanding the communist leadership did its best to prevent such attempts by disrupting the broadcasts. Another strange phenomenon of the 1950s' American anti-communist propaganda was "sending balloons the [Soviet] zone which were spreading propaganda pamphlets."¹²⁹ Moreover half-military underground movements were also organized by the USA, which were gathering supporters from Eastern bloc countries in order to undermine communist systems.¹³⁰ Although the situation gradually eased from the second half of the 1960s (e.g. the disruption of Radio Free Europe was terminated in 1963), the socialist authorities were not supporting the infiltration of American culture.

¹²⁸ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 43. Translation mine.

¹²⁹ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 44. Translation mine.

¹³⁰ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 44. Translation mine.

Moreover – as the official propaganda of the 1960s and 1970s showed – they were trying to deter Hungarians from US culture, and strengthen patriotism in Hungarian youth by increasing the quality of Hungarian music programs.¹³¹

In spite of communist anti-American efforts, even the narrow segment of the United States, which managed to reach Hungarian people gained extreme popularity. America was surrounded by a mythical enthusiasm in Hungarian public perception. László Borhi brings examples from the 1950s: (1) the Buick Century car of the wife of the American legate was "regularly surrounded by [such a great] crowd [...] that traffic police officers had to interfere."¹³² (2) Fake news were spread that clothes, which had been sent by the US for the 1954 flood victims, are kept in a depot. When the news was heard large masses invaded the building to seize the American clothes – even by breaking the windows of the depot. These instances give perfect illustration about the extent of Hungarian enthusiasm for American items. This exaltation did not fade away by the 1960s and 1970s. Hungarian films, such as *Csinibaba* (1997) [Dolly] *Made in Hungária* (2009) [Made in Hungary] or *Apacsok* (2010) [Apaches], provides interesting description of the era when the United States was associated with liberty and the way out of the restrictions of socialism. The characters in all of the three films are desperately searching connection with the US, and anything that represents the free world – such as rock and roll music, American records (which was an item of illegal trade), American cigarettes, lighter with an Elvis photo on it, misconceptions about Coca-Cola, or a strange habit of playing Native Americans in Hungary.

In public conception the USA had an extremely different image from that created by the official communist propaganda. People were highly sensitive to the products of American culture, however they received only a tiny fragment of it, often in distorted format. For a large

¹³¹ Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 102. Translation mine.

¹³² Borhi, *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945-1989: Források*, 40. Translation mine.

proportion of Hungarian society did not regard the US an imperialist evil, but associated it with freedom without the burdens of socialism.

4.2. Hungarian Writing about the US after the System Change of 1989

For presenting how Hungarian writing changed after the political changes of 1989, I will analyze Károly Jobbágy's travelogue, *Amerika poétaszárnyon* [America on A Poet's Wings]. The book was published in 1996, after the collapse of the socialism, when a free democratic system had already been set in Hungary. However his visit to the US was ten years earlier, in 1986, still in the Kádár era. By the time of Jobbágy's journey, he was at the age of 65. He was disillusioned and tired of the difficulties of his life and as an extremely sensitive elderly poet he sometimes confesses a wish to return to Hungary in his travelogue. Therefore we cannot trace the features of the post Cold War era in his explicit enthusiasm about the country, but he can freely write about any topic that counted as taboo in the socialist era. As a poet of numerous poems about the revolution of 1956, the aim of his journey was to perform such poems to the Hungarian-American audience. In his travelogue he explicitly writes about topics concerning the revolution, he includes some of his revolutionary poems and honestly talks about the setbacks and restrictions of socialism. He uses a very personal and really honest tone that is again a feature of freedom of speech:

[...] he is suggesting that it would be good to publish my cycle of poems, *Revolution of Tigers* for the 30th anniversary (of the revolution of 1956). I'm unwilling.

-Why?-he asks.- What could they do to you?

- They could for example take away my pension complement. [...] After I have died, these poems would also be published.¹³³

In this quote he writes about his revolutionary poems and confesses that he is afraid of publishing such poems even for American audience, because the socialist system could take a revenge on him. On another page, he confesses to read Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag*¹³⁴ that was banned in the time of socialism. In Jobbágy's work, the reader cannot identify compulsory, centrally guided elements to present the US in accordance with the official stand of the country, but one only encounters the personal experiences and opinions of the author together with a number of previously banned topics.

¹³³ Károly Jobbágy, *Amerika poétaszárnyon*, (Balassagyarmat: Ipoly Könyvkiadó, 1996), 32. Hereafter cited as Jobbágy, *Amerika poétaszárnyon*. Translation mine.

¹³⁴ Jobbágy, *Amerika poétaszárnyon*, 91. Translation mine.

5. Conclusion

The end of World War II brought a significant break to the relations between the United States of America and Hungary. Although the two countries had maintained a friendly relationship with extensive economic connections in the interwar period, friendship was suddenly replaced by hostility at the end of the 1940s, when the new order of the bipolarized world emerged bringing along the Cold War between the two superpowers, the United States and the communist Soviet Union. Since Hungary was turned to a satellite state to the Soviet Russia, the relationship with the United States was destroyed simultaneously. The Cold War lived its heyday in the 1950s, when the interaction between the two poles of the World became limited to the minimum. The Hungarian revolution of 1956 caused such changes in Hungarian politics that paved the way for a relative normalization of American-Hungarian relations. After 1956 the communist leadership realized that the strict Stalinist policy was not able to keep up any more. In this way, the Hungarian Communist Labor Party turned to an easing policy with the leadership of János Kádár. One of the most significant steps was taken with the amnesty of 1963. From this time on American-Hungarian relations made visible improvements, mainly in the field of economy, but slow development started in cultural aspects as well. The improvement process reached its climax in 1978, when the MFN contract was signed between Hungary and the US and Hungary was given back the Holy Crown. The 1980s did not manage to show such achievements, since the pace of approximation between the two countries slowed down due to international factors. Nevertheless Hungary was gradually getting rid of the pressure of her Soviet chains, so the achievements of the 1970s were possible to maintain. The year of 1989 brought a crucial change in Hungarian politics, since the country announced her independence as a free democracy. This momentum put American-Hungarian relation to a different basis.

The changes in the relations between the United States and Hungary was reflected in the official communist propaganda. Since this machinery served the interests of the communist system, the image presented to the Hungarian public about the United States was adjusted to the relevant political atmosphere. The Hungarian propaganda literature of the early 1950s released a large number of writings about the United States, in which the rhetoric of extreme hostility played crucial role. As the analyzed texts of the 1950s proved, the main themes represented a wartime overtone. This kind of explicit antagonism was replaced by a much disguised one from the 1960s on. There still remained certain issues to create a negative image about the United States, but the rhetoric was of a milder tone. Although the negative attitude towards the US in the post-1956 socialist era remained until the system change of 1989, the strength of it gradually faded.

Since the socialist press was centralized and each and every item released was filtered through censorship, a guided centralized system is reflected in the socialist Hungarian writings about America as well. The monopoly of the communist ideology required authors to include certain elements and to write in a certain way to create an image about the US that corresponded with the official ideology of the era. That is why the common elements of the analyzed writings were not difficult to trace.

In spite of the hostile tone of the official socialist anti-American propaganda, the Hungarian publicity always showed great enthusiasm towards the United States, which was regarded a mysterious, unavailable remote place that reserved freedom even for those suppressed by the socialist system.

1989 brought the freedom of press and speech to Hungary as well that meant a huge change in writing about the US. Although central censorship does not guide the representation of the United States in Hungarian press any more, the image making role of media never disappears. Different viewpoints present different forms of representation still today, which

raises the issue of objectivity. The huge mass of indirect information reaching today's Hungary is filtered through different media. The question arises from this: does today's popular American images in Hungary represent realistic picture indeed?

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